



United States Department of the Interior
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge
27650 B South Valley Road
Lima, Montana 59739
(406) 276-3536
Fax (406) 276-3538



February 13, 2012 Contact: *Bill West, Refuge Manager*, 406-276-3536, bill_west@fws.gov

Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge Announces Release of Final Environmental Assessment of New Hunting Plan

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has released the final environmental assessment (EA) regarding the new hunting plan for Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge.

An environmental assessment analyzes the possible impacts that a proposed action may have on the environment taking into consideration the environmental, social and economic aspects. The purpose of the assessment is to ensure that decision makers consider the ensuing environmental impacts when deciding whether to proceed with an action.

In preparing the final EA, the Service evaluated several alternatives based on the Service's mission and the purposes of the refuge and in consideration of public input throughout the planning process.

The selected alternative for public hunting on Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge modifies the existing hunt boundary to include the expansion and simplification for big game and waterfowl hunting opportunities.

In the weeks leading up to the general gun elk and deer seasons, elk have congregated in high numbers (>300) within closed hunting areas. Concern over harboring of elk, not providing high quality hunting opportunities, and not assisting Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks meet its management goals for elk in the Gravelly Elk Management Unit, sparked interest in rewriting hunt boundaries. Our goals for this hunt plan are to redistribute elk, provide harvest opportunity, and provide high quality hunting experience. To proceed cautiously, we will limit the number of big game hunters to two per day during the general gun big game (e.g. deer and elk) season.

In the expansion area, mule and white-tail deer are in low densities, likely resulting in minimal increases in deer harvest with boundary changes. Waterfowl hunting will be simplified to include distinguishable boundaries. For example, the new waterfowl hunting boundary of Lower Lake will be moved eastward to 50m east of Odell Creek.

Lastly, to prevent illegal shooting from the road right-of-way, a no-hunting area will extend 50 yards from either side of a road's centerline on the South Valley Road. The expansion areas will likely not result in *any significant* local or regional population declines for the described game species. The proposed action will provide quality hunting opportunities, will maintain time and space separation from non-hunting recreation users, and will maintain ecological and biological integrity of Refuge habitats.

Applications for the limited big game hunt will be accepted in August of 2012. A maximum of two hunters per day will be selected. Applicants must fill out a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Big Game Hunter application form and submit to the Refuge manager by August 31st. Names will be selected at random on September 4th. Applicants are not required to be present to win. If selected, hunters will be contacted by mail. If applicants do not show by one hour prior to shooting hours on the date they were selected, the permit(s) will be given away at a first come first served basis. If this method proves effective, a similar process will be used in subsequent years.

New regulations will apply in fall 2012.

Ask for applications electronically by email to: Bill_West@fws.gov or use the following address:

Red Rock Lakes NWR
Attn: Bill West - Limited Big Game Hunt Application
27650B S. Valley Rd.
Lima, MT 59739.

The refuge is located in Beaverhead County, 40 miles East of Lima, MT via I-15 Monida exit (28 miles gravel) or 45 miles West of West Yellowstone, via Henry's Lake, ID (25 miles gravel)

The EA and hunting plan are available on our website at <http://www.fws.gov/redrocks>

Red Rock Lakes NWR was established April 22, 1935 "As a refuge and breeding ground for wild birds and animals" (Executive Order 7023) The Refuge is 76 years old this year.

The refuge is over 50,000 acres and is comprised of two large shallow lakes and an abundance of other wetlands, creeks, streams and the Red Rock River. It is the largest wetland complex in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The backdrop to the refuge is the Centennial Mountains and continental divide. The refuge has an abundance of swans, ducks, geese, moose, elk, and antelope. During the summer there are 200+ species of birds.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>

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